

Duels

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Summary: Set alternately in Duel of the Fates and fifteen years or so before Episode 1, the story of Qui-Gon and Darth Maul.

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a Duel of the Fates fic

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 ****Disclaimer:**** I own none of these guys, except for Balin.

Lucas can have the rest of 'em; I'm just playing.

> Author's Note: While I gathered some of the basic structure of the Jedi Temple from the Jedi Apprentice series, this fic is not canon for it. Forget everything you ever knew about Xanatos, or any other of Qui-Gon's padawans. That said, this fic was inspired by the Duel of the Fates (duh)...watch the sequence where Qui-Gon and Maul are fighting, the few seconds before Maul clips him under the chin with his lightsaber...and you'll know where I'm coming from. I've also been told that this is a fic that doesn't know when to take itself seriously at times. Keep that in mind, I suppose...

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> <p>Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn knelt between the two force fields, trying hard to look calmer than he felt as he regained his breath and slowed his racing heart. The duel this Sith Lord was putting him and

his padawan through was excruciating. Never before had he been forced to fight for his life like this.<p>

No, he realized suddenly, that was a lie-he had been in a lightsaber duel such as this, many years ago. But he had been younger, and his opponent less adept, and the duel much less anticipatedâ€|

* *

Qui-Gon had been watching the trainees in their mock-duels for some time, and he was beginning to grow tired of it all. The endless repetition of half-trained teenagers with sometimes only marginal Force talent could grow immensely boring. Qui-Gon often wondered why those Masters who had already chosen padawans came to watch. He himself was only there due to the Council's insistence that he choose a Padawan Learner.

He forced his attention back to the current "duel" with some effort, and was surprised to see some ferocity on the part of these students. Usually their manner suggested that the entire fight had been choreographed ahead of time, but these two fought long and hard and even Qui-Gon would have been hard-pressed to guess the winner.

When the duel had ended, he turned to the small, green Master beside him and asked, "The winner of that duel, theâ€|" he grasped for a moment before finding the name of the race, "the Zabrak. What is his name?"

"Balin, his name is," Yoda replied, and Qui-Gon nodded thoughtfully as he turned his attention to the next two fighters.

* *

Qui-Gon was drawn out of his memories by a tingling on the edge of his Force sense: the laser wall in front of him was coming down. He leapt to his feet, igniting his lightsaber to block the Sith's downward stroke. They spun into the service area, moving around the pit in the center, lightsabers flashing in a deadly dance. It was only by stubborn force of will that Qui-Gon was still fighting at all, he knew; that same stubborn force of will that had irritated so many of his associates for so long.

* *

The Jedi Council Chamber was hot and incredibly humid, but none of its occupants seemed affected by the uncomfortable conditions. Qui-Gon Jinn was as calm as any of the Council members seated around him, despite the argument they were engaged in.

"Glad we are, that you wish to choose an apprentice, Qui-Gon," Yoda was saying, "but your choice we do not agree with."

"There is a possibility that the boy would not be suitable for Knighthood," Master Windu added.

Although he was surprised, Qui-Gon's expression did not change as he turned to face the leader of the Council. "From all I have learned, any trainee in the Jedi Temple is eligible to be chosen as a Padawan Learner. Or has the Jedi Code been rewritten in the past five years?"

Master Windu frowned, but Eeth Koth spoke up before he could say any more. "You are so sure that this is a challenge you are capable of handling?"

Qui-Gon glared at the Zabrak Master. Koth's tendency to always speak in questions had always been irritating; the fact that the question seemed totally irrelevant now was trying his patience. "The Council has believed for almost a year that I am capable - no, am obligated - to train a Jedi apprentice. Are they now withdrawing their support?" he asked in irritation.

Mace Windu sighed and exchanged glances with Master Yoda. It was going to be a long verbal sparring match.

* *

Qui-Gon knew he was beginning to tire, that he could not keep up this kind of duel much longer on his own. Already his tactic had switched from a fierce offense to a desperate defense, and he knew that the Sith recognized this change, and reveled in it. He prayed that the laser barrier separating his padawan from the duel would retreat soon, and wished that he could spare the concentration to trigger the switch. From the one quick glance he had gotten of Obi-Wan, he could tell that the younger man felt the same: he was almost ready to jump out of his skin with every blow struck, absolutely itching to get back into the fighting.

Qui-Gon had always had a talent for instilling that kind of eagerness in his padawans, some rogue part of his mind reflected idly as the duel continued. His obsession with the Living Force, he supposed it was; or perhaps it was his own joy of life hidden under a usually stoic demeanor. But then, the other Masters were right, too-sometimes, it could get out of handâ€¦

* *

Qui-Gon knocked aside his padawan's lightsaber blade with his own for the fourth time of as many attacks. Although they had been dueling for nearly an hour and he could see that his apprentice was beginning to tire, he did not stop to call an end to their practice duel. Although Balin's strength and ferocity of attack were admirable, his endurance still left something to be desired. He deflected another half-hearted downward stroke and frowned. Perhaps it was time for some good-natured advice.

"You need to focus a little more on your attacks," Qui-Gon commented as he deflected another stroke. "You do very well at the beginning of a duel, but by now you're so clumsy Master Yoda could defend himself against you."

Balin glared viciously at his master through the glare of their blue and green practice sabers. It was never really quite clear to either of them later what sparked his reaction-perhaps it was the fierce temper that the Council had been so wary of, or just exhaustion coupled with irritation-but it was not quite the reaction Qui-Gon had hoped for. Balin's attack grew stronger, yesâ€¦too strong. Within moments, Qui-Gon found himself backing up at an alarming rate, fighting hard to keep his padawan at bay. His Force sense seemed to shiver at the edges, a touch he had never felt before, but knew

immediately. *The Dark Sideâ€|* he thought with a tremor of--could it be fear? No, never fear of his apprenticeâ€|

Nevertheless, Qui-Gon realized what it was that Balin had touched, and forced himself to split his concentration, to dedicate a part of his mind to pulling the boy away from whatever connection it was he had established. It would not be easy, he realized as soon as their minds touched. *Deceptive, the Dark Side is,* Master Yoda had said, *and easy to follow. Not so easy to separate.*

The split of his concentration suddenly proved to be too much: Balin struck at his master with a ferocious slice, and Qui-Gon felt his blade go spinning out of his hand only moments before the practice blade grazed his neck. He fell to his knees with a grunt of pain, thankful only that they had not been using blades of full strength.

Qui-Gon's fall seemed to snap Balin out of the trance he had fallen into, and the boy collapsed next to his master. "Master Qui-Gon!" he gasped. "Are you all right?"

Qui-Gon nodded painfully, trying to resist the urge to test the burn on his neck. Again he thanked the Force that they were only using practice blades. A real lightsaberâ€|

He glanced back up at Balin, but his padawan's eyes showed only concern for his master and shame for what he had done. Qui-Gon could still not forget the Council's warnings of two years ago, or the look in Balin's eyes as he brought his lightsaber down on his master's neck.

* *

The rogue bit of Qui-Gon's mind that had been refusing to concentrate on the duel suddenly snapped to attention as the Jedi Master found himself staring into a frighteningly familiar gaze over locked lightsabers. *Noâ€|* he thought as he wheeled away in surprise. *It couldn't beâ€|* But the look was so like the other one that had haunted him for so long, even after he had leftâ€|

* *

"In the light of this incident, and given this Council's earlier misgivings, we have decided that the Zabrak boy Balin can no longer be allowed to continue his Jedi training," Mace Windu was saying. He sounded as if he were reciting from a memorized script.

* *

Qui-Gon did not try to hide his surprise, nor did he think he would have been successful had he tried. Could this Sith Lord really beâ€|?

The Jedi Master had not seen Balin in over fifteen years, but now recognition seemed far too easy. The build was right, and through the heavy tattoos he did seem to be Zabrak. And the eyesâ€|were different, but the look in them was the same.

Once again his moment of distraction cost him dearly, as the Sith who had been Balin struck Qui-Gon under the chin with the hilt of his

double-bladed lightsaber. Qui-Gon's Force sense was screaming at him, but he could barely muster the concentration to hold himself up at the momentâ€|

* *

"Will he not be dangerous, a half-trained Jedi in the Ag Corps," Qui-Gon protested, knowing it was futile.

Master Windu shook his head. "He was in training for less than two years. He will not be a danger. But he will be well watched."

* *

Qui-Gon gasped in pain as the lightsaber entered his belly. The blade was yanked out again almost as quickly, but Qui-Gon knew that the wound would be fatal. *Revenge at last, Balin,* he thought, and wanted to impart this thought to his former padawan, but the Sith Lord had already turned around.

On the edges of his senses, he could hear Obi-Wan screaming in despair, moments before the young Jedi came barreling out into the service chamber, fury in his eyes. *Revenge for revenge?* He thought. *No, Obi-Wan, don't kill him like thatâ€|*

He knew it would not happen that way. Obi-Wan was strong, so much stronger than Balin had ever been. He would never be pulled so strongly to the Dark Side.

This assurance in mind, Qui-Gon laid back in wait for death and the Force. An odd feeling of relief spread through him - he had finally come to the end of the duels.

* *

> <div>There is no death, there is the Force

End
file.